

6 May 1955

DRAFT MEMORANDUM FOR THE DCI

SUBJECT: Political Trends in Saigon

1. Bao Dai [is continuing his efforts to retain his nominal role as Chief of State and] now has a "new" plan which he may present to French and US officials in Paris. This plan may receive some support from the French, but it would almost certainly be unacceptable to practically all elements in Vietnam. The events of the past two weeks have practically eliminated Bao Dai's influence in Vietnam. There is little remaining sentiment for his retention, even as a constitutional monarch. Diem and his supporters almost certainly would not now agree to any council named by Bao Dai, and particularly one containing Buu Loc, Buu Hoi, and the Cao Dai Pope.

Any effort by the US or France to "sell" this plan would almost certainly be rejected by Diem.)

2. At the moment, Diem, the Foreign Office appear to agree that Bao Dai has little influence and that probably he will be eventually deposed. They also appear to agree that this should be accomplished gradually and in a relatively orderly fashion. Diem's approach involves having the Estates General (a conference of provincial and local officials convoked by Diem on 4 May) approve the following steps: (a) Bao Dai to proclaim that he restores all

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powers to Diem, (b) Bao Dai to give all necessary powers to a national assembly once it is constituted by free elections, and (c) Bao Dai to guarantee that he will not attempt to change the government, withdraw powers from Diem, or otherwise intervene in internal Vietnamese affairs pending action by the ~~constituent~~ assembly.

The French Foreign Office regards this approach as providing the best prospect for settling the present crisis and for curbing the Revolutionary Council which they regard as a dangerous menace.

3. At the moment, it appears that Diem ~~is in control of the situation~~ ^{is in} ~~is in~~ control of the situation. The self-styled Revolutionary Council now appears to be competing with Premier Diem for political leadership in South Vietnam. The Council is not a unified group and at its ^{creation} ~~inception~~ was primarily an opportunistic creation of the work of ^{the} ~~three~~ ^{who planned} sect generals designed to rally nationalist support and, possibly, to usurp power from Diem. Diem appears to be using the Estates General as a counterweight to the extremist pressures originating from the Revolutionary Council. Moreover, Diem's government appears to have the loyalty of the bulk of the Vietnamese National Army (VNA), which is the key element in the Saigon area, and he probably could disperse the Council if it offered an immediate threat to the government.

(add)

4. Although the Revolutionary Council offers an inviting target for Viet Minh infiltration and exploitation, there is as yet

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Convincing
no ~~significant~~ evidence from French or other sources that the Council is now being influenced by Viet Minh agents. Moreover, the principal source of power of the Council, the sect troops behind certain Council leaders, are themselves strongly anti-Communist.

5. *[]* Diem is aware of the danger of Communist infiltration of the Revolutionary Council, although he states he has no evidence of such activity at this time. He is also concerned lest the ~~Government~~ provoke anti-French incidents in Saigon, thereby creating a dangerous situation and serious disorders. He desires that the French make gestures of support for his government so that the present high degree of suspicion of French motives and actions in the recent crisis may be moderated and the chances of anti-French manifestations reduced. It is unlikely that such approaches can be made with optimum results so long as General Ely remains in Saigon.

6. The possibility remains that Diem will be unable to control the Estates-General and that combined elements of the Estates General and the Revolutionary Council will demand the immediate depositing of Bao Dai. In this event, Diem will probably feel it essential to go along. As he has explained to General Collins, he believes "everyone" is against Bao Dai, and he would probably believe that to resist further would seriously prejudice his ability to retain control of the situation.

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wh ensured*

7. If Bao Dai is quickly deposed, extremist elements would have increased their power, and there would be increased opportunities for future Viet Minh exploitation. There might also be some defections in support of Bao Dai among higher VNA officers. In general, however, we believe the bulk of the VNA would remain loyal to Diem and that he would be able to retain control of the government, at least until a constituent assembly was formed.

8. In any case, if the US and France are to continue to influence developments in Vietnam, they will have no feasible alternative in the short run than to continue cooperation with Diem. In the event Diem concurs in actions to depose Bao Dai, any effort by US or France to restore Bao Dai's influence directly or *indirectly*, through alternative individuals or solutions, would probably strengthen the position of extremist elements, produce anti-US and serious anti-French manifestations, and increase the possibilities of Viet Minh exploitation of the situation.

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23 April 1955

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

The thrust of General Collins' remarks given in two two-hour sessions in the State Department can be briefly summarized as follows:

1. Diem stinks.
2. The situation in South Vietnam is entirely ascribable to Diem's failures. My and the French can in no sense be held responsible for it.
3. If chaos is to be averted, Diem must go.
4. A successor government, either one established along lines of the Collins-Hanoi pattern or along the lines of the Ban Dai plan, should be established.
5. Diem would be powerless to offer the successor government notable difficulties.
6. The successor government would work.

The rest of this memorandum consists of two parts: the first an elaboration of the outline above, and the second some examples of discrepancies in General Collins' testimony as it was spun out in the two parts.

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National Estimates

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* Present:

[REDACTED]
unidentified army officers from the Pentagon.

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